

CLASSICSCLIMBS

Johann Papendorf enjoying the Levitation pitch of *Scimitar Ridge*. Photo GEORGE HORN

Scimitar Ridge

by GEORGE HORN

My first introduction to the Jonkershoek Mountains was on a Mountain Club hike with Greg Forsyth in 1990. We hiked up to Berg River Nek and traversed back over The Cathedral (Second Ridge Peak), descending the *Slabs Route*. My experience of the views of that valley, its peaks and the Boland as they opened up around us has been a magnet for my return over the years.

Soon after that, I was drawn to rock climbing as a preferable way to climb mountains and, after barely a handful of climbs on Table Mountain, a similarly inexperienced friend and I were hiking up the Jonkershoek forests early one morning to climb *Pisa Ridge* on The Cathedral. My strong memory of that climb was being reduced to jelly after going off-route onto unsound rock. We topped out late in the evening with cloud encroaching from below and magnificent views of the Helderberg Dome floating on a sea of clouds that stretched all the way to the shores of Table Mountain. After descending late into the night, we met our rescue party, called up by my friend's anxious wife, while driving out the valley.

Years later, I climbed *Pisa Ridge* again with another friend who mentioned *Scimitar Ridge* as route of great quality. It is easily accessible from Langrivier Kloof and follows an obvious ridge all the way to the summit of First Ridge Peak. The rock is of great quality all the way, but it is a big mountain that is not often climbed and one must take care. A camera-sized rock has left a dent in my helmet while I was following the second pitch on my last ascent.

One has to take care to traverse at the correct point on the first pitch. We didn't the first time I climbed it, and had an awkward time finding our way out of a pickle. Dirk Versveld relates a similar experience when he soloed the route with Tinie Versveld and Ed February, and they had to rescue his pack so that he could very cautiously get back onto safe ground.

Dirk has shown that the route can be done quite quickly, soloing it once, quite alone, leaving his house in Jonkershoek on his bicycle at 6.30 am, summing at 11 am, returning to his bike by 12 noon and home at 12.20 pm. I wish I had the confidence and fitness for such fun!

FACT FILE

Scimitar Ridge

FA: Andre Schoon and party. 1957

Grade: 13

Pitches: 9 roped pitches plus 5–8 rope lengths of scrambling.

Approach time: Approx. 2hr 30 min. from the reserve gate.

Climbing time: 8 hr

Descent time: Approx. 3 hr to the reserve gate.

Aspect: South-west. The route is in morning shade.

Best time of year: November to March.

Gear: Standard trad rack.

Approach

From the Jonkershoek gate: Follow the tracks that take you up into Langrivier Kloof. From the junction of Langrivier Kloof and the contour path, a 30-minute slog up the first right-hand tributary leads to the base of the ridge. 50 metres of scrambling from the left, diagonally to the right over easy rocks past a lone pine leads to a beacon at the foot of the first pitch in the centre of the wall.

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Photo KARIN BURNS



1. **20m (10):** Climb diagonally left up a sloping ramp to the level of an obvious climbing traverse. Traverse 12 metres right over some blocks to a grassy ledge.
2. **45m (8):** Climb up via a crack on the right of the grassy ledge, then move left into a recess past a large climbers friend bush and follow the face back onto the crest.
3. **50m (10):** Climb up the crest to a chimney, and climb the chimney.
4. **15m (10):** The 'Levitation' pitch. Step off a projecting rock spire onto a rock shelf on the main face and up a short face to a broad platform. The ridge lies back somewhat from here.
5. **120m:** Either climb four short pitches of C/D scrambling along the crest of the ridge or walk approximately two rope lengths right and up to where the crest of ridge steepens again.
6. **40m (10):** Climb a clean crack and traverse right, then continue up and diagonally left. Follow an easy face to a ledge.
7. **30m (11):** The original route description used to go left at this point. Instead, traverse right and ascend diagonally right until a very pleasant face and crack with layaway holds is reached. Climb this to a ledge.
8. **15m (8):** Traverse left and up a bushy recess. Traverse right at the top to the base of the crux chimney pitch.
9. **50m (13):** Ascend the chimney past chock stones until an easy and obvious traverse to the left is reached. Follow this and ascend up and onto the crest. Follow an easy crack to a ledge.
10. **50m (10):** A deceptively easy pitch just right of the crest and easy scrambling on the crest leads to a ledge.
11. **150m:** Approximately 3 rope lengths of C/D scrambling along the crest leads to the summit of the ridge.
12. **10m:** Down-climb into the notch between the ridge and the final section.
13. **200m:** B/C scrambling for 4 rope lengths leads to the summit.

Descent:

Walk over the top of First Ridge Peak and descend the SE Ridge to a nek and down a gully to join the *Slabs Route*. When you join the *Slabs Route*, move to the right of the gully (going down) to pick up a vague path and cairns which lead you rightwards down scrambles, then straight down and then left along a traverse ledge that brings you to the base of the rock bands into a clearing under some trees. Descend the slope to reach the contour path.

It is recommended that if you are unfamiliar with the area, you first hike the descent route before attempting the route.

For more information on the Jonkershoek mountains, walks, scrambles and climbs, get Ernst Lotz's guide *Jonkershoek en sy Berge*. Only in Afrikaans, but a very definite must-have if you want to explore these fascinating mountains.

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